PRACTICAL WAYS TO CREATE MEANING

Iowa-made gifts strengthen our local connections

For many Iowans, few things are more important than family or community. That’s especially clear during the winter holidays when celebrations with friends, family, and neighbors remind us of those close, local connections.

So this winter, try purchasing at least one gift that is either made or grown in Iowa. According to the 3/50 Project (http://www.the350project.net/home.html), for every $100 spent in independent, locally owned stores; $68 comes back into the community. For every $100 spent in a national chain, only $43 comes back. Spend it online, and nothing comes back.

Buying locally not only strengthens our community connections, it also presents an opportunity to enrich the meaning of the holidays. Local purchases keep jobs in Iowa, but—because local shops often sell unique items—they force us to think more creatively about gift-giving. This often leads to more meaningful, and personal, gifts for the people we care most about.

Here are resources to help you buy Iowa products and services:

- The Iowa Bed & Breakfast has a list of unique places to stay in Iowa, organized by region, with gift cards available.

- The Iowan Gift Guide is a directory of Iowa produced products in gift baskets, ranging from wines and chocolates to shirts and soaps. Sponsored by The Iowan magazine.

- Farmer’s Markets almost always feature top-notch, locally grown produce, as well as locally made pastries, jewelry, meats, honey, soaps, chocolates and more. Some Farmer’s Markets extend their seasons into winter. Here’s a list of a few of these markets:
  - Des Moines
  - Cedar Falls
  - Independence
  - Waverly
  - Iowa City
  - Dubuque’s Farmer’s Market (http://greendubuque.org/content/view/16/51/) is a year-around event.

  And here’s a statewide list of Farmers Market from the Des Moines Register.

- Need a hostess gift? Iowa-made wines and beer, jellies, jams, and cheeses are ideal.

- Community Supported Agriculture memberships provide the receiver with great food AND the community farmer with increased support. Here’s a list of CSAs in Iowa from Practical Farmers of Iowa.

- If chocolate is your thing (isn’t it for most of us?), check out Bochner’s Confections based in Iowa City.

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